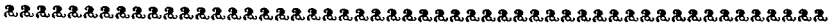


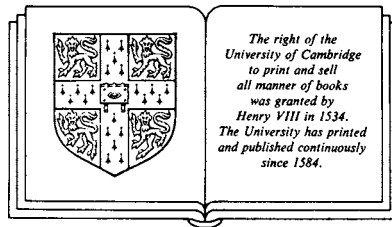
A PROTESTANT VISION

WILLIAM HARRISON AND THE
REFORMATION OF ELIZABETHAN
ENGLAND



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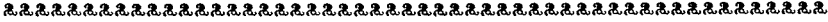
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The Two Churches

William Harrison's 'Great English Chronology' shows how attitudes derived from European mainstream Protestantism when deployed in the English context could become transformed by their new environment into something identifiable as 'Puritanism'. Harrison's detailed examination of salvation history since Adam in his 'Chronology', written in the 1570s, developed a received historical model through which he also interpreted his contemporary experience of the Reformation in England. That historical viewpoint therefore helped to define the content of Harrison's radical Protestantism within the particular conditions of the Elizabethan Church, for he believed that interpreting both world history and contemporary events according to the criteria laid down by the Scriptures unanimously confirmed that the English Reformation represented yet another episode in the eternal struggle between the True Church and the satanic Church of Cain.

Drawing heavily upon the European formulators of the Protestant world-view, Harrison's 'Chronology' traced this conflict in the Scriptural account of history from the Creation, and in post-Scriptural history. Together with his well-known *Description of Britain*, the 'Chronology' applied the criteria of a True Church which he found implicit in this Scriptural interpretation to all aspects of Church and society in Elizabethan England. For the 'Chronology' also reflects the fact that Harrison had grown to maturity through the disquieting religious fluctuations of the previous four decades which in hindsight seemed to fit the universal pattern of conflict. Perhaps most importantly, the method and viewpoint of the 'Chronology' developed more fully elements of Harrison's historical thought which had originated in a period of personal evangelical crisis in the 1560s. This transformation in his thought paralleled his increasing unease about the precise status of the Elizabethan Church within his scheme of universal conflict. Harrison's thought prominently displays a close connection between his historical interpretation and his critical, Puritan view of the Elizabethan Church, for only within his scheme of salvation history could Harrison find assurance about his own role in furthering the purposes of the True Church

in the world. In turn the strong historical foundations of this world-view enabled him to seek the complete reformation not only of the Elizabethan Church but also of the whole of contemporary society by reference to the criteria laid down by the True Church in its unceasing conflict with the Church of Cain.

Born in London to a small merchant family in 1535, his years as a schoolboy at St Paul's exposed Harrison both to the conservative humanism of Colet's foundation and to the new learning of Cranmer's English liturgy.¹ Probably in the reign of Edward VI he became what he self-deprecatingly called 'an unprofitable grammarian' at Westminster School under the enlightened Protestant educator, Alexander Nowell. This grounding in good letters laid the basis for his later rejection of the barbarities of scholastic Latin, especially its distortions of the Scriptures. It also introduced him to the techniques of textual criticism which when applied in the 'Chronology' helped to establish the boundaries of legitimate knowledge by diminishing the authority both of popish forgeries and Hermetic occult speculations. The reinforcement of those boundaries by reference to Scriptural revelation preoccupied Harrison when he wrote his 'Chronology'.² Looking back from an increasingly zealous, evangelical perspective in 1565, Harrison concluded that before the Marian reaction he had known Christ 'as well as his age permitted'.³

This did not prevent him from taking Roman Catholic orders as an undergraduate at Oxford. In 1556 while a member of Christ Church, he became what he later described in 1565 as 'a shaven worshipper of Baal', although he claimed to have been recalled from this 'insanity' by the powerful preaching of the Oxford Martyrs sometime before July 1558. Those words carefully described experiences which shaped two ideas dominant in his later thought, and especially evident in the 'Chronology'. The reference to the idolatrous Gentile cults of the Old Testament foreshadows his later obsessive identification of popery with Gentilism, while the alleged means of his conversion to Protestantism encouraged the fixation

¹ *Harrison's description of England in Shakespeare's youth*, ed. F. J. Furnivall (4 parts. London, 1877), appendix I, p. li.

² *The Description of England by William Harrison*, ed. Georges Edelen (Ithaca: New York, 1968), p. 76. 'The Great English Chronology', Trinity College Dublin MS 165 (hereafter referred to as TCD MS 165), fos. 124^r, 221^r, 350^v, praises the great classical grammarians and condemns the schoolmen. See G. J. R. Parry, 'William Harrison (1535-93) and "The Great English Chronology": puritanism and history in the reign of Elizabeth' (unpublished Cambridge Ph.D. Dissertation, 1981), chapter I for more biographical information.

³ Harrison's autobiography, written on an end leaf of John Bale's *Scriptorum illustrium maioris Brytannie... catalogus* (Basileae, apud Ioannem Oporinum, Feb. 1559), now Derry Diocesan Library shelf-mark D.ii.d.7., translated and printed in G. Edelen, 'William Harrison', in *Studies in the Renaissance*, ix (1962), pp. 256-72, at pp. 258-9.

that preaching could produce a psychological awakening, creating a regenerate understanding of the world. The vehemence with which Harrison described his apostasy reflects the deep psychological scars left by his Oxford years, and he took pains to emphasise that he became a Protestant before Elizabeth's accession, at some risk of persecution from 'that Jezebel', Mary Tudor. This need to identify with the persecuted True Church throughout time formed an important part of the dichotomous view of world history later presented in Harrison's 'Chronology'.⁴

In 1559 Harrison became Rector of Radwinter, Essex, where he attacked ingrained popery, which he saw as the remnant of antichristian religion, through that same medium of preaching which had brought him to a regenerate understanding of the world.⁵ He sharpened that vision on the whetstone of theological studies during the 1560s, taking his B.D. from Cambridge in 1571, possibly as a member of the proto-seminary at Christ's. There he breathed the supercharged atmosphere of committed evangelical Protestantism which saturated Cambridge in the 1560s, and which provided the context for his increasingly rigorous reassessment of all human knowledge according to what he perceived were the Scriptural criteria of legitimate knowledge. One casualty of this weeding-out process was the Hermetic philosophy, whose mystical interpretation of the cosmos Harrison seems to have accepted during his popish years at Oxford. In the 'Chronology' he specifically rejected several important aspects of this philosophy.⁶ On the other hand the historical and chronological works which Harrison acknowledged in 1565, and which were later transformed into the 'Chronology', gained added importance by falling within what Harrison perceived to be, in this evangelical context, the legitimate bounds of human enquiry.

Indeed Harrison's account of the works which he had written by 1565 reads almost like an analysis of the separate elements of his world-view at that period, elements later combined in the 'Chronology'. None of these works survive, and although their titles reveal his already deep interest in history and chronology, not until Harrison united these two pursuits did he fully discover the mysteries inherent in the fulfilment of the divine promises, a discovery which enabled him to draw correspondingly radical conclusions in his 'Chronology'. One of these works described in 1565, a life of St Paul, made a more subtle contribution to the development of Harrison's thought. Like many another Protestant who had experienced the psychological trauma of a sudden conversion, Harrison must have been struck by the great personal relevance of Paul's life, as well as finding it an intriguing historical

⁴ Parry, 'Puritanism and history', pp. 11-22, has more details about Harrison's Oxford experiences. Edelen, 'William Harrison', pp. 258-9.

⁵ See below, pp. 154-7.

⁶ See below, pp. 107-9 and 309-16.

and chronological problem. More importantly, in tracing Paul's life in the Acts and Epistles, Harrison came to share the Pauline view of the Scriptures, to be convinced of the direct relevance of the entire history of the Church for the present struggle to build it up with 'lively stones'.⁷

Harrison had also written a history of Britain by 1565. British history later formed a substantial part of the 'Chronology', but although England consequently seemed to play a considerable role in the unfolding drama of the Two Churches, this was merely because, as Harrison admitted, 'I regard not gretly to dele in thantiquities of forren nations'. His historical interpretation focussed on the universal Elect Church, not any particular Elect Nation. Two other works from this period of intense evangelical activity, 'Chronological computations from the beginning of the world to his own time' and 'Reflections on the same', introduce the subject of chronology, and underline the fact that for earnest reformers the whole course of time only existed to give fulfilment to God's prophetic promises for His Church.⁸

Whatever may have been the tone of Harrison's lost 'Reflections' on time, eventually he became fascinated by its mysteries, tantalisingly revealed both in its large-scale structure and its most intricate and obscure patterns, parallels and symmetries. The 'Chronology' exemplifies Harrison's willingness to discern divine meaning in chronology, and shows that this readiness to participate in divine mysteries formed an essential part of his radicalism. The admitted intricacies and obscurities of chronological studies should not mislead us into dismissing as unimportant an area of knowledge which Harrison and many of his contemporaries took so seriously. Accepting this mystical element in Harrison's thought helps us to answer the important question why he chose to write a chronology rather than a chronicle, for he clearly found levels of meaning in the process of time which could not be satisfactorily explained by a conventional narrative history.

Perhaps for this reason Harrison eventually abandoned the large history which occupied most of his attention in 1565. He then claimed to be 'daily writing...on an uncommon compendium of history in imitation of Aelian, Gellius, Macrobius, Petrarch and Politian'. All these writers had practised the late classical, Christian and humanist tradition of historical biography, using historical examples to illustrate normative moral and political conduct. Very probably this compendium consisted of some sort of narrative history written with a high moral tone, but as Harrison became increasingly preoccupied with finding providential meaning in the past such a constricting framework must have become correspondingly less suited to displaying that

⁷ Edelen, 'William Harrison', pp. 258-9. See also J. S. Coolidge, *The Pauline Renaissance in England* (Oxford, 1970)

⁸ TCD MS 165 fo. 23v and Edelen, 'William Harrison', pp. 258-9, which omits cancelled references to the history of Britain and another, briefer, chronology in Harrison's list in Bale's *Scriptorum*.

meaning, and so he began his 'Chronology' about 1570.⁹ Thus he came to espouse the more distinctively Protestant, and particularly German, interest in the detailed study of universal chronology and history as a means of discerning God's will, a change which paralleled his growing disquiet about the state of the Elizabethan Church. These related concerns increasingly dominated Harrison's thought as apocalyptic tensions rose throughout the 1570s.¹⁰

Like other sixteenth-century historians, however, Harrison also recognised the more mundane usefulness of chronology as a way of imposing some sort of order on the chaos of historical facts. Jean Bodin elevated the commonplace into a ground rule for historical research when he insisted that 'Those who think they can understand histories without chronology are as much in error as those who wish to escape the windings of a labyrinth without a guide.' The best writers were the most meticulous in dating events said Bodin, for 'without a system of time hardly any advantage is culled from history'.¹¹ Yet the determination of an exact chronology proved such a daunting task that the means often became an end in itself. Abraham Fleming, editor of the second edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles* to which Harrison contributed, observed that 'it is not a work for everie common capacitie, naie it is a toile without head or taile, even for extraordinarie wits, to correct the accounts of former ages so many hundred yeares received, out of uncertainties to raise certainties, and to reconcile writers dissenting in opinion and report'.¹² The fact that 'so diverse is the observation of true yeres' often troubled Harrison, for 'a man shall hardly gesse how to leane unto the likeliest'; as for errors in transcription, 'I accompt them almost infinite'. Widely differing chronological systems caused almost insoluble problems of synchronicity, and when the Septuagint differed from the Vulgate Old Testament by as much as thousands of years, only relative accuracy was possible. Polybius, whose magisterial strictures against erring chronologers Harrison acknowledged 'leaveth no place for me', set the standard, allowing that 'the matter is not great to erre in a year or two'. Harrison's efforts over two decades to achieve even finer precision went unappreciated, however, and Fleming's observation just quoted was an attempt to defend Harrison's accuracy from attacks by other members of the Holinshed group.¹³

⁹ He used these authors merely for factual information in TCD MS 165, e.g. fos. 41r, 60r, 119v, 162v. Parry, 'Puritanism and history', pp. 412-13 on the MS's period of composition.

¹⁰ See below pp. 125-31.

¹¹ J. Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. B. Reynolds (New York, 1945), p. 303.

¹² R. Holinshed, *The first and second volume of chronicles* (at the expenses of John Harrison et al.: London, Jan. 1587), sig. Y6r.

¹³ TCD MS 165, fos. 209v, 65v-66r, 46v, and see G. J. R. Parry, 'William Harrison and Holinshed's *Chronicles*', in *The Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), pp. 789-810, esp. 809-10. Parry, 'Puritanism and history', p. 415, on Harrison's very precise chronological arrangement of his notes.

Harrison's declared intentions in writing his 'Chronology' not only maintain this ideal of a precise and complete record of the past but also bring us closer to the centre of his world-view, to his response to the Scriptures. Not all the trivial details of history had an obvious place in the unfolding continuum of salvation history. Yet much that we would dismiss as irrelevant lumber demanded Harrison's attention because it exemplified the truths that could be found in the Word, simply because it formed part of the unbroken chain of history which gave fulfilment to God's promises. Therefore more than frustrated pedantry caused Harrison to bemoan his failure to clarify the succession of High Priests from Herod to the Fall of Jerusalem, for he sought 'the certaintie of the historie... to the uttermost of my power next unto the preaching of the worde which is my cheefe vocation'. Harrison held the study of time and history second in importance only to the perpetual preaching function of the True Church. It absorbed his energies to such an extent that he lost all sense of proportion, and in struggling 'to be exact even in the smallest things... now and then I am constrained to over passe some that are of more value'.¹⁴ Such dedication found encouragement from authorities such as Philip Melanchthon, whose work Harrison admired and who argued that the precise historical fulfilment of Scriptural prophecies proved 'that our word is come of god, and that none other faith save ours is true'; a faith confirmed by chronology, for prophecy showed 'whan Christe muste come, and whan the end of the worlde is to be loked for'. In Harrison's thought we find this same nexus between true doctrine and accurate chronology, as in his comment that 'Eusebius is gretly overshoted oftentimes so well in soundness of doctrine as supputation of his times'.¹⁵

In Harrison's view then an important part of the meaning of the Scriptures lay in the exact knowledge of the historical experiences of the True Church which they recounted. To help to elucidate this meaning he wrote a detailed chronological treatise described on the title page of his 'Chronology', but not extant, which he claimed was the first attempt to make it 'easie for the reader of the scriptures to discern the true time of each incident whose daie and yere is noted' in the Bible. Therefore the Scriptures not only prophesied the chronological framework of history since the Creation, but also provided much of its content and dictated its interpretation, so that a proper, faithful understanding of history and chronology complemented Scriptural learning. The mixture of tasks which Harrison set himself in his 'Chronology' makes

¹⁴ Thus this succession helped him to establish that Christ had died in the extremely portentous year 4000 AM (TCD MS 165, fo. 138v) and see below, pp. 96-8 on the prophetic importance of that date.

¹⁵ P. Melanchthon, *The thre bokes of Cronicles whyche John Carion... gathered* (trans. and pr. Walter Lynne: London, 1550), 'The use of readying hystories' fo. *6r., TCD MS 165, fo. 41r-v.

this connection more evident. The 'three cheifest pointes' were 'the exact correction of the time, confirmation of doctrine, or disclosing of necessary antiquitie'.¹⁶ The reference to doctrine might seem anomalous in a work ostensibly devoted to chronology and history, but it reminds us that the Scriptures provided Harrison with a distinctive interpretation of history, an interpretation which itself formed a vital part of true doctrine and which reveals just what he meant by 'necessary antiquitie'. Taken together, the three tests of true doctrine, exact chronology and correct historical interpretation provided the criteria by which Harrison could judge all historical phenomena, and by which he could perceive that the Elizabethan Church, as part of the prophetic continuum of history, came under the same judgement.

Harrison believed that the Scriptural view of time and history had as much relevance to his contemporary situation as had Scriptural doctrinal teachings. In fact he found it unnecessary to distinguish between them. Within this particular historical framework the Puritan willingness to regard the Scriptural experience as directly applicable to contemporary circumstances ceases to be paradoxical. For despite the fact that history presented a prophetic continuum of discrete events, Harrison steadfastly believed in the contemporaneity of the Scriptures for all times, since all events were united by the same encounter with God. Even at the chronological level this assumption emerges in his quotation of the Hebrew proverb that 'there is neither first nor last in the scriptures, as if it should mean the Scriptures do not alwaies observe the order of time'.¹⁷ This immediately raises the question, to put it in Harrison's terms, of whether his response to the Word depended entirely on the immediate working of the Holy Spirit, or whether it derived from human authority. In other words, how much did this idea owe to the Hebraic patterns of thought which shaped the Scriptures?

The uniformity and uniqueness of Hebrew thought can be easily overstated, a temptation particularly irresistible to the school of 'biblical theology' which flourished from the 1930s. In reaction to historical biblical criticism these theologians attempted to stress the unity, coherence and relevance of the Scriptures, mainly by contrasting Hebrew with non-biblical thought. They found the distinctive character of the Scriptures to be so obvious that they attempted to account for it by suggesting that the Hebrews had a different psychological perception of time from that of western man, that they displayed a deep sense of contemporaneity with the Scriptural

¹⁶ TCD MS 165, fo. 170v.

¹⁷ Ibid., fo. 48v, and compare H. Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (London, 1949), p. 72: the example of Israel would live for us 'if only we could rid ourselves of an obsession and genuinely convince ourselves that the history of the ancient Hebrews [in exile] was fundamentally of the same texture as our own'.

experience which made it perpetually relevant to their present circumstances. This now venerable tradition of Scriptural interpretation is often summarised in a contrast between the senses of *Χρονος* (linear, chronological time) and *καιρος* (time comprising religiously decisive moments). This interpretation distinguishes Western man's presumed chronological outlook from an alleged Hebrew perception of 'realistic' or *καιρος* time made up of segments distinguished by their historical contents. Such analyses frequently assert that the Hebrews held times with similar contents to be identical, that the intervention of God in history freed the Hebrews from chronological time by bringing them into simultaneous relationship with those who at all times remembered the covenant with God as part of the cult. It is therefore argued that this sense of cultic simultaneity reflected a particular type of psyche. From the modern evangelical viewpoint this Scriptural emphasis on contemporaneity makes the Bible's religious message universally relevant.¹⁸ Some recent historians of Puritan thought have adopted similar views.¹⁹

However, the arguments of 'biblical theology' assume that Hebrew thought remained unchanged over many centuries, and they also depend upon a selective use of the scanty biblical evidence about Hebrew thinking on time. Hebrew words for time, chosen without regard to their various contextual meanings and historical changes in their use, have been cited in support of what are essentially theologians' philosophical generalisations about time. These lexical weaknesses need detain us no longer than the obvious point that many characteristics designated as peculiar to Hebrew thought are universally present in human nature. For the Hebrew perception of time was the same as ours. As we shall see, the undoubted sense of contemporaneity which permeates the Scriptures and to which Harrison displayed particular sensitivity has another source. Furthermore it is important to notice the Old Testament's preoccupation with chronology, which is perhaps mistakenly overlooked by apologists for the distinctiveness of Hebrew thought. For the biblical text, as Harrison found, cannot be understood without giving due attention to the detailed chronological data which impressively underpinned the Scriptures' authoritative account of history from the Creation. Chronology not only integrated the historical Scriptural books but provided the sole justification for some parts of the Bible.²⁰ The next chapter will examine this element in Harrison's thought

¹⁸ J. Marsh, *The Fulness of Time* (London, 1952), pp. 20–52, conveniently summarises this approach, but J. R. Wilch, *Time and Event, An Exegetical Study of the Use of Eth in the Old Testament in Comparison to other Temporal Expressions in Clarification of the Concept of Time* (Leiden, 1969), pp. 1–17, succinctly analyses and criticises this whole school of interpretation. See also J. Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (2nd edn. rev. London, 1969), pp. 11, 21–7, 33–56, 94–8.

¹⁹ Especially Coolidge, *Pauline Renaissance*, which sometimes overstates the contrast between 'Jewish' and 'Greek' thought.

²⁰ Wilch, *Time and Event*, pp. 20, 32–4, and Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, pp. 28–31 and 158, which traces 'Biblical theology' back to Bergson's philosophy.

more fully, but here we should note this uniquely Hebraic influence on his thinking. For he clearly believed that in laboriously detailing the working out of God's will from the very beginning, he shared with the Old Testament Hebrews a compelling understanding of God's nature. From that perspective no part of linear time and history escaped God's control, for everything contributed to the fulfilment of God's promises to his Elect, and thus to the elucidation of the divine character.

Such an outlook found support in Scriptural teachings on the unity of Creation and the inextricable connections between all occurrences in it. As Bodin concluded, all events were 'by almightie God bound in such fit order and consequence, as that those things which are first have coherence with the last; and those which are in the midst with them both, and all with all combined and bound together' indissolubly. Harrison similarly read outwards from Scriptural intimations of God's purposes, to profane history. He saw in Pompey's installation of Antipater over Palestine 'how the providens of god beginneth to work, for the removing of the Scepter from Juda to thend the prophecie of Jacob may ones be fulfilled and Christ our savior sent into the worlde, which could not ere this time be worthily fulfilled'.²¹ The Incarnation had been accomplished as part of the measured order of history, and so would be the end of all time. From Harrison's foreshortening perspective near what he believed would be the end of time, the purpose of chronology was to show the relationship between events juxtaposed in time only by God's will.²² On every page of the 'Chronology' that mysterious will could be seen working itself out to its awesome doom.

The Hebrew grasp of chronological succession was not unique, despite frequent attempts to stress its independence by somewhat loose comparisons with alleged Greek cyclic views of history. Neither Hebrew nor Greek thought remained uniform, and there are fundamental methodological problems about contrasting unformulated Hebrew thought with the formulations of Greek philosophy, but in any case not all Greek philosophers taught that history moved in cycles. Nor were Greek historians influenced by these philosophical theories, and surely it is their work that must be compared with the Old Testament view of history. There would only be a complete contrast if the Greek historians posited cycles of exact, eternal recurrence of all the events they related, and clearly they did not.²³ Greeks

²¹ Jean Bodin: *The Six Bookes of a Commonwealth*, ed. K. D. McRae (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 436. TCD MS 165, fo. 130v, cf. Gen. 49. 10. Bodin eventually abandoned Christianity for a personal type of Judaism (D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London, 1958; 1975), p. 171, and P. L. Rose, *Bodin and the Great God of Nature* (Geneva, 1980), pp. 134-48). See below, pp. 61, 72.

²² *Description*, ed. Edelen, p. 390, on Harrison's expectations of the End.

²³ Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, pp. 144-7; Wilch, *Time and Event*, pp. 13-14; and esp. A. Momigliano, 'Time in ancient historiography', in *History and the Concept of Time (History and Theory)*, Beiheft 6 (1966), pp. 4-13.

would have understood the Bible's concrete account of time, while Greek historians had a strong sense of unique chronological succession in history – indeed their raw materials only achieved the status of historical evidence when they could be dated.²⁴

At this point, however, an important difference between Greek and Hebrew approaches to history emerges. Greek historians applied rules of evidence, demanding eyewitness reports or at least corroboration of oral evidence; this effectively limited their history to the recent past. In contrast Hebrew historians subordinated themselves to the prophets, accepting the values of those who claimed to interpret all events because they had been shown the predestined course of time. Therefore Biblical history achieved uniqueness by its continuity from the Creation, by its presentation of a significant line of events which demonstrated the continuous intervention of God in His world. Immune from the Greek scruples about evidence, Biblical history was not distinguishable as myth, because the evidence in its favour formed part of the cult, either written down or kept in the collective memory of Israel. The Hebrews felt themselves under a religious obligation to remember all of their past, but when the earliest Christians appropriated this history it proved incomprehensible to learned pagans because it offended all their notions of historical evidence.²⁵

Again only a relative distinction can be drawn between the Hebrew emphasis on historical events as divine manifestations and the beliefs of other Near Eastern cults. Contrary to what is often assumed, the so-called nature gods did not merely reveal themselves through natural cycles but also acted in history – in fact history and Nature were not clearly distinguished in the ancient Near East. The Old Testament shared many of the common traditions and motifs of other Near Eastern religions, in which ethical patterns became laid down as the word of the god found fulfilment in the moral retribution visited upon nations and individuals. The Israelite cult was really distinguished not by its understanding of history but by its different conception of the deity. Monotheism enhanced the tendency towards a unitary historical perspective, where one divine aim increasingly emerged as unchallenged.²⁶ The Scriptures actually referred to several divine plans which

²⁴ Until the 5th century BC chronological lists constituted most of this evidence (ibid., pp. 15–16).

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 16–21. This theoretical requirement persistently revived the antipathy between faith and reason. Calvin rebuked the ungodly who questioned the authority of Genesis because Moses had not seen all he recounted (*A Commentarie of John Calvine, upon the first booke of Moses called Genesis. Translated out of Latin into English by Thomas Tymme* (Henry Myddleton for John Harrison and George Bishop: London, 1578), sigs. B1r and P7v).

²⁶ B. Albrektson, *History and the Gods. An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and in Israel* (Lund, 1967), pp. 16–23, 41, 55–67, 100–6. Albrektson concludes that by attributing relatively more importance to God's activity in history, Israel gave it more influence over the cult, e.g. in 'historicising' original agrarian feasts into the Passover (ibid., pp. 115–16).

were rarely spelled out, but for sixteenth-century readers like William Harrison the most striking fact about the assumed unitary divine plan was the recorded continuity of belief in its existence throughout both the Testaments. The stream of prophetic witnesses to the fulfilment of God's promises gave history its special character for Harrison, and persuaded him that those promises would be kept in the present. Only one medium transmitted this insight, and in the Bible's brilliant account of the Elect's successive encounters with God we find the real reason for the centrality of the Scriptures in Harrison's thought.²⁷

Modern theologians have suggested that this recognition of a corporate personality, the perception of a special relationship with the people of the covenant throughout the ages, was an important feature of Hebrew thought. Therefore this suggests another way in which Harrison's thought processes echoed theirs. This way of thinking did not involve a subjective 'present actualisation' of past events, as 'biblical theologians' have claimed, but more significantly the recognition that salvation history comprised a distinctive line of events which clearly demonstrated God's continual intervention in His creation, and that there had existed a number of individuals along that line whose intimate experience of God's power gave their lives unique importance and relevance to the present. This represented not anti-historical cultic simultaneity, but a firm belief in the certainty of God's character and the continuity of His covenant, which confirmed the comparability of distinct historical circumstances. The principles derived from each encounter between God and the Elect could thus be 'actualised' in the present.²⁸

William Harrison interpreted the Scriptures in this way. He perceived the biblical text as a simple, linear rendering of a complex and multi-faceted reality, a single phenomenon that comprised the whole experience of the Elect under the care of God. That experience offered edifying instruction in how to obey God's will in contemporary circumstances when the Elect still lived under God's care. The very arrangement of the Scriptural history confirmed its contemporary relevance, for the Holy Ghost, said Harrison, 'doth often by later examples set furth such things as passed before time in men of like condition and are omitted in their histories'. This way of thinking allowed Harrison to find in the Scriptures the lineaments of a complete reformation for Church and society, just as the isolated criticisms uttered by members of the Hidden Church under the medieval papacy 'gathered together and brought into one perfite treatize... wold set downe the order of a perfite reformation'. Not for the last time can we see Harrison

²⁷ The basic insight was unoriginal; its chief importance for us was its transmission to the sixteenth century by the Scriptures (*ibid.* p. 110).

²⁸ See Wilch, *Time and Event*, pp. 74-5, 51, 170; Momigliano, 'Ancient historiography', pp. 18-20; Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, p. 150. The problem of exactly how these principles were derived is discussed below, pp. 22-6.

applying what he conceived to be a Scriptural historical pattern to non-Scriptural history. Indeed not only the internal coherence of the Scriptural account of the Elect but the coherence of that interpretation with the rest of creation, in Harrison's eyes, showed that 'the confirmation of the Scriptures is not to be had from man'.²⁹ Once one achieved this correct understanding of the Scriptures, confirmation of their teachings could be discovered not only within the sacred text but also in all past and present phenomena, properly interpreted according to Scriptural criteria.

Seen in the context of Reformation thought, Harrison's acceptance of the Holy Spirit revealed in the Scriptures clearly owed more to human authority than he would have liked to admit. The precise contemporary source of his Scriptural interpretation is ultimately unknowable, but he carefully enlisted the great authority of Philip Melancthon in support of his argument that essentially the Scriptures described the perpetual combat of two churches, the True Church and the satanic Church of Cain, for to some this Protestant argument seemed distressingly novel.³⁰ Harrison fundamentally agreed with the outstanding German scholar, but there were equally important differences between them which show how particular English conditions reinforced Harrison's fervent interpretation of the Scriptures, while Melancthon's experiences encouraged him to take a more sanguine view of the past and its meaning for the present.

Harrison's belief in the continuous Elect covenant line, which in its relationship with God filled past and present, echoed the argument in Melancthon's edition of *Carion's Chronicle*, where 'he hath excellently set furth the state of the church of christ from [time] to time touching the prosperity and decaie therof and therunto infinite examples of the iustice and mercy of god right worthy to be redd and perused of all men'. The significance of this approbation lies in the nature of Melancthon's interpretation of church history, which explains world history. Harrison did not simply admire Melancthon's scholarship, but accepted his depiction of a fundamental pattern in history through which both men sought to explain the present, by reference to the first moments of the Church's existence. Essentially the contemporary conflict did not differ from the struggle at the foundation of the True Church and its satanic parody, the False Church of Cain. Satan's ceaseless attempts to undermine what God had set up ensured that there would always be complete and utter antipathy between what Harrison called 'the line of the right wise', founded by Adam, and the teachers of false doctrine, the sect founded by Cain when he separated from

²⁹ TCD MS 165, fos. 6r, 304v and 168r. See Coolidge, *Pauline Renaissance*, pp. 33-5, on the Pauline roots of this Scriptural interpretation.

³⁰ Heinrich Bullinger when pressing a similar case conceded that 'All thys I suppose wyll be new and straunge in many hertes', for the unlearned believed that Christianity had begun under Tiberius (*The Olde fayth*, tr. Myles Coverdale (1547), sigs. E5r-v, B1r).